

PREACHER-POLITICIAN IS WRITING THE NEW CONSTITUTION OF STATE OF OHIO

Buckeye State, Always Interested in Personality, Finds that of Its New Leader Engrossing.

By JAMES B. MORROW.

Columbus, April 20.—Anybody can be heard in Ohio. Many a citizen seems to say: "Go ahead, my friend; talk away. I have a grand old opportunity of hearing you. When you get through I want you to listen to me."

Respectfully, you understand, I walked into the constitutional convention the other day just as a man exclaimed: "Here (referring to a little valley among the hills) they (meaning the early settlers of the valley) buried their dead, and their bones, buried their young, and buried their dead."

Yet every delegate was alert and apparently interested. But there is more to the case than mere respectability, which, after all, is only opinion or opinionism. The people of Ohio are indulgent. The path leading from one side of the country to the other passes straight through the State. Bending back and forth far more than a century have been provisions of men with ideas, hallucinations, and misgivings. Some of them, however, to break cargo never resumed their journey.

Then there has been the usual native output of persons having visions and dreams. Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet, tarried a while in Ohio. The latter, however, was tarred and feathered. Gen. Jacob S. Coxey started his army of tramps toward the National Capital from the driving little city of Massillon. Returning, he ran for governor and polled more than 30,000 votes.

Also personally counts in Ohio. The face and the vocal notes as well as the principles of William Jennings Bryan were nowhere more capitulating than in the State house, famous by Edwin M. Stanton, John Sherman, and Salmon P. Chase, chief justice. Audacity, too, is oftentimes successful. Tom L. Johnson came along, tossed his rights, denounced protection, and mocked plutocracy, and Cleveland, smothered in the smoke of furnaces and factories and filled with millionaires, sent him to the green. Later it chose him to be mayor of the municipality.

Bigelow the Politician.

To-day Ohio is telling over the writing of a new constitution, and Herbert Seely Bigelow, a preacher and a single-taxer, and a recall, initiative, and referendum propagandist, is president of the convention. Likewise, he is an adroit and resourceful politician, through the power of a constitution. Further, he is a landowner, magnate, and oratorical Ohio, tolerant and admiring, and careless, so long as its asserted principles are in no immediate danger. He is Bigelow, simply observing: "Let's have what he has to say." That is always the attitude of Ohio. It listens—maybe it laughs—and then rejects moonshine and hears.

There are plenty of watchful and intelligent men who snigger and predict that Mr. Bigelow's constitution, or those parts of it which he is practically writing, will be thrown overboard by the electorate. It is to go before the people in sections, they say, or reject. The fight, accordingly, will be over propositions. One or two of the delegates, however, such as an event they will become the organic law of the Commonwealth. The rest will go to the rubbish heap.

Last autumn the voters agreed to be inclined to try the initiative and referendum. Next autumn, having reflected on the matter meanwhile, they may vote the proposition down as being unnecessary and revolutionary. Judas Hymen, the governor, and a Democrat, is against it. Burton, their United States senator, and a Republican, says that "perfect government" is obtained by change of methods, but by a stimulation of the civic virtues and a quickened sense of the responsibilities of citizenship. The legislator, my friends, he reminds the constitution makers, "is a mirror of the people." In other words, if the people want a grafter, they will elect him to the city council or the legislature. Leaving the voters to think about Senator Burton went back to Washington.

Debs Refused an Invitation.

Other conspicuous men have come to Columbus solemnly to take part in the tournament of eloquence and wisdom. President Taft has been here, and Col. Roosevelt, and Mr. Bryan, and Judge Lindsey, of Denver, and Joseph R. Burton, of Cleveland, and Judge Hiram Johnson, who believes that he "kicked the Southern Pacific Railroad out of the politics of California." There was a suggestion that Eugene V. Debs be asked to come and enlighten the convention. So far, however, a formal invitation has not been sent to him.

Thus, for once, Ohio has been incapable, indifferent, or neglectful. But single-taxers from all over the land have been stealing in unofficially, and stanch Socialists are sitting among the delegates. Elsewhere, outside of the hall of the convention, no Ohioan, living up to his traditions, would refuse to lend his ear and a little of his time to Mr. Debs or any one else who is picturesque, uncommon, sincere, or interesting.

For years a stove stand for speakers, in the heart of the business center of Cleveland, was free to permanent and itinerant orators. They might preach everything, anything, or nothing to an audience of settled citizens and pedestrian tourists, while playful boys at the edges of the crowds gave new comedy to the entertainment by hurling wads of paper, soft vegetables, and lumps of moist earth toward the noisy and dodging apostles on the platform. Strange doctrines were preached at such gatherings and violent ones, besides.

But harm, so far, has never come to Ohio or its institutions through its toleration. Its contrasting elements, and its love of contrast and debate, the melting pot is always over the fire, but there are no explosions. Five groups of unlike people settle in the State. Swedes, Dutch, and English came from New Jersey. Virginians trickled northward through the passes of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Men from Massachusetts founded the town of Marietta. Connecticut families moved into the Western Reserve. Pennsylvania crossed over the line and filled the eastern counties. There were Germans, Scotch-Irish, and Scotch-Irish among the new inhabitants.

A Strange Ohio Mixture.

With them were Dunkards who washed the feet of their brethren as a pious ceremony and Dunkards who did not; Amish who wore beards and eyes covered with butter and whose hair was cut twice a year by their wives; Quakers who started a socialist community with a common bakery, a common dairy, a common grocery and dry goods store, and a common brewery, but which collapsed during the third generation; and Mormons who built a temple 60 feet long, 10 feet wide, and 50 feet high, exclusive of the steeple, that is standing yet and can be seen from the top of Gardiner's monument.

There was ferment of course—many

excited dialogues, but seldom anything more. The ancestors of some of Senator Putnam's constituents in Holmes County, where he was born and passed his boyhood, resisted the draft in 1862. And to the fields, made a fortification of fence rails, and a way of cornstalks, and defied the national government. For finally the place was called afterward—No Greenbackers in the country were more frenzied or argumentative than were those living in the vicinity of Toledo. John Sherman, twenty years after he resumed specie payments, went un-forgotten by them to his grave. The Anti-Slavery League, which now agitates and ramifies in all directions, North and South, as well as East and West, was brought together under the very eaves of the big breweries of Ohio. Writing a constitution and debating it will be a pleasant exercise. Getting it adopted will be a wholly different matter. Not every constituent wrought out in Ohio goes through whatever may happen to the document now in the middle stages of partition, a test will have been made in one of the great states east of the Mississippi River over certain principles, which, when applied, as the guarantee runs, will eliminate everything that is censurable in government.

But in 1802 a convention was called by the authority of Congress to draft a constitution for the people of what was then the Territory of Ohio. The delegates met at Chillicothe on November 1 and completed their work in twenty-nine days. Men did not talk at that time with the prolixity of a later generation. The constitution was signed by their countrymen. In 1803, after a year, the people. Thus Ohio came into the Union.

Why Ohio Millionaires Dodge Taxes

Twenty-nine years afterward, in 1831, the old constitution was modernized in the city of Columbus by 39 delegates. The voters accepted the changes by a majority of more than 1,000. That is the constitution in force at present and the one that Mr. Bigelow and his colleagues are attempting to transform along the lines of progressive doctrines. To-day in Ohio property cannot be divided into classes for taxation purposes. All property—houses, lands, bonds, and stocks, as well as merchandise and machinery—is supposed to be taxed on the basis of its true cash value.

Five years ago, a constitutional convention, of which Morrison R. Waite, later chief justice of the United States Supreme court, was president, tried to divide the property of Ohio into three classes. The farmers, marching solidly and eagerly to the polls, tore the Waite constitution into pieces and then stamped the ink of their grudge on the document. The first, came as a tax of 10 cents. Rich men, owning 4 per cent bonds and 6 per cent shares in outside corporations, in railroads, for instance, were taxed at 10 cents. The second class, comprising manufacturers and manufacturing companies not located in Ohio—thought it a hardship to pay most of their income into the treasuries of their country. Rich men everywhere ran as high as 2 per cent. If, therefore, a man with \$100,000 of the bonds of the Lake Shore Railroad obeyed the law to the letter, his net return, after paying his taxes, would have dwindled to about \$1,000.

As a result the average citizen did not mention his bonds and stocks to the assessors, but hid them in his pocket. He went to the legislature and the newspapers. They followed a period of incursion. Detectives were employed and given the job of hunting down the tax evaders. They performed their task thoroughly. In the end they knew the names of all the shareholders of all the corporations in Ohio. Rich men everywhere within the State were put under oath and then confronted with exact lists of the personal property standing in their names. The legislature, my friends, "is a mirror of the people." In other words, if the people want a grafter, they will elect him to the city council or the legislature. Leaving the voters to think about Senator Burton went back to Washington.

One Man Paid \$50,000.

A millionaire in Cleveland settled with the legislature by writing his check for \$50,000. Scores of capitalists and manufacturers rented apartments in New York City, bought houses in Washington. Most of them continued to live in Ohio, but all of them abandoned Ohio as a place of legal residence. They ceased, of course, to vote in the State. The legislature, however, was not to begin in a township or a small village. The whole country, they think, will capitulate later. They might be called, without any disrespect to either body of belief, the Christian Scientists of politics.

Up to date the Ohio convention has been a success. The special election and the separate propositions as a scheme of action can be attributed to the generosity of Mr. Bigelow. He is prominent in the group of tireless, enthusiastic, and skillful tacticians who are trying to get the single tax started in widely separated parts of this country. They are financed by Joseph Fols, the Philadelphia soap manufacturer, and have a newspaper, an organization of lecturers, and a busy brotherhood of prophetic and descriptive writers. Single-taxers seem never to think about or work at anything else. Experience has made them competent as strategists, while real gives swift wing to their words and a shining light to their countenances. They are willing to begin in a township or a small village. The whole country, they think, will capitulate later. They might be called, without any disrespect to either body of belief, the Christian Scientists of politics.

Even so, but Mr. Bigelow himself would like to change them. He believes that taxes should be laid on land alone; that a vacant lot in a city should pay as much as the lot and a taxpayer next to it. The business men who pitched the constitutional convention could not forgo that Mr. Bigelow would be chosen president, and that of the 19 delegates to be elected would vote to accept the initiative and referendum, begged about, however, with the provision that it shall not apply to the single tax as a legislative proposition. Mr. Bigelow was made and made with all the skill of able politicians to wedge the single tax into some section of the new constitution, but twenty-two farmers are delegates, and they, with manufacturers, merchants, and other practical men outnumbered the philosophers.

"Why," I asked Mr. Bigelow, "did the delegates elect you president of the convention? You are a Socialist, a single-taxer, and a referendum, initiative, and recall man."

"I have been described as a Socialist," he answered, "by those who disagree with me. I am used to the name. Socialism is a broad term. It means one thing to you and perhaps another thing to me. I can say, however, that I do not agree with the philosophy of Socialism as I understand the word. I do believe, however, in what is known as the single-tax theory of raising public funds. Still, I would not favor the application of the principle to the whole State of Ohio."

"I would prefer that counties and municipalities call conventions and decide matters of taxation for themselves. That would permit experimentation, and the plan would eventually be accepted by all communities. While I have worked for the initiative and referendum, Ohio, in my opinion, is not ready for the recall. Answering your inquiry specifically, I say that I have been chosen to preside over the delegates because I was at the head of an organization that insisted upon knowing how each delegate felt about membership in the convention stood on the subject of the initiative and referendum. We sent pledges to the candidates. Here they

HERBERT S. BIGELOW.

are—and Mr. Bigelow took from the top of his desk a package of papers held together by a rubber band. The delegates, signing the pledges, received the support of our organization. A majority for the initiative and referendum was elected to the convention. Logically, I was the man for president. In the election of delegates party lines were practically disregarded. It happens, however, that the Democrats control the convention, having sixty-five members. The Republicans having forty-five, the Socialists, four, and the Union Labor organizations about ten to twelve. We met January 8, and may not adjourn until late in the spring. The delegates, however, are limited to one year. In no case will they be re-elected. The plan at first was to write a new constitution. In that event it would have been approved or rejected in its entirety. We decided, however, to agree on a series of propositions, so that they might be voted on singly. Some may carry and others may not. Anyway, the unpopularity of one proposition will not jeopardize the others. These propositions, which are accepted by the people, will be attached to the present constitution as amendments, nullifying the sections, of course, with which they are in conflict.

Plans of Single-Taxers.

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